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5 January 1982

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director, FBIS

THROUGH : Chief, Operations Group

SUBJECT : Monthly Report - Bangkok Bureau - December 1981

I. GENERAL

As the crisis-ridden year of 1981 drew to a close, more bad news was presented the Thai people and the government of Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanon in early December with the announcement that the Consumer Price Index rose by more than 11.5 percent over 1980, an astounding rise of more than 176 percent over the 1976 base. This announcement was made on the heels of a 1 December price hike for premium gasoline of 13 percent. Despite the gloomy economic picture, a greater threat to the Prem Government was intense political wrangling that resulted in a 14 December announcement by the prime minister that he had decided to reshuffle (for the second time) his cabinet to include members of Thailand's largest party, the Social Action Party. The subsequent coalition gave Prem a parliamentary majority for the first time, but prompted a new crisis and fresh coup rumors when the Democratic Party--upset over certain cabinet selections--came to the brink of withdrawing from the new coalition. As the new year arrived, the parliamentary pressures had eased considerably, but coup rumors remained a weekly topic of conversation and press speculation. Publicly, there are appeals for unity and public support, but privately Prem's most probable New Year's resolution is to remain in power until the next elections--22 April 1983--thus becoming the first Thai prime minister to serve a complete term of office from appointment to elections. study!

II. OPERATIONS

A. Monitorial/Editorial

1. An announcer on Bangkok's Voice of Free Asia the evening of 15 December stunned the Thai monitor and duty editor by attributing the regular commentary to FBIS. A subsequent check showed that the commentary in fact was a verbatim account of the opening and closing paragraphs of an earlier TRENDS

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analysis on the postponement of the Vietnamese Party Congress, Fortunately, there have been no repercussions either through local media requests or Hanoi response. Evidence points to the Thai Embassy in Washington as the source of the "leak."

2. Periodically, local reports citing Thai Government security officials make the rounds alleging the revival of the communist clandestine radio Voice of the People of Thailand, which ceased broadcasting in 1979 only to be succeeded by clandestine morse transmissions identified as SSPT. This month proved to be no exception. The Bangkok paper NATION REVIEW reported on 3 January that security forces had "recently" detected voice transmissions identified as VOPT beaming messages on a "trial run" which was "monitored over shortwave frequencies within 2 kilometres from its location" in the northern province of Nan, but due to lack of detection equipment the precise location could not be determined. Responding to Embassy requests for information on this source and programming, the bureau again stepped up its cruising efforts, this time around the alleged new frequency of 5555 Khz. Although efforts to locate the transmitter were unsuccessful, we did reconfirm that SSPT morse transmissions were using frequencies close to 5555 Khz in parallel with the normally heard stronger frequency of 9007 Khz. Bureau efforts to locate this very elusive target continue. ✓

III. ADMINISTRATION

A. Personnel

1. Prospects for finding a viable candidate to fill the vacant Cambodian/French monitor slot brightened somewhat during the month. A strong candidate found by the London Bureau tested well in both languages and was given a tentative offer of employment. Two other candidates were located via recruiting efforts in New Zealand, and a fourth candidate was tested by Operations Group late in the month. Final selection will await a comparative evaluation of all candidates.

2. In a meeting with Ambassador Dean on 11 December, the bureau chief received verbal approval for a future non-staff increase in the event that satellite monitoring or other operational developments require additional personnel. ✓

3. Unbeknownst to the "victim," the carefully planned annual bureau Christmas party, held this year on the 23rd, was retooled into a surprise birthday party for the bureau chief. In addition to the traditional birthday cake, Deputy [] read aloud the chief's "fitness report"--bordering on incompetence--compiled collectively by the staff editors and monitorial unit chiefs. Five days earlier, a

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bureau family Christmas party was held on the lawn of the chief's residence and visited by a "technical" Santa Claus with a noticeable Hawaiian accent.

B. Buildings and Grounds

On 5 December, Shell House management implemented a new security pass system designed to discourage would-be intruders. Several cases of vandalism in lower-floor offices had prompted the decision to improve security. Under the new system, all entrants to the building after hours and on weekends and holidays must identify themselves either with a Shell House identity card or, in the case of U.S. Government employees, an Embassy ID card.

IV. COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

1. On 13 December, Deputy Chief [redacted] and the bureau chief anchored the Diplomatic Corps "A" team in its annual bowling competition against the Thai Foreign Ministry--led by Deputy Foreign Minister Arun--and contributed significantly to a resounding victory. In an uncharacteristic and all-too-rare performance, the bureau chief garnered both high-game and high-series honors in the 40-man competition, while the deputy chief placed fourth in high series. 25X

2. A representative number of bureau personnel joined other U.S. and Thai employees in welcoming the New Year at a Mission-wide party 30 December sponsored by Ambassador and Mrs. Dean on the Residence grounds.

3. In recognition of the "increased importance" of Thailand's position in Asia and its relationship with the United States, the State Department has upgraded the Bangkok Embassy to the highest category of representational posts. Bangkok now joins Tokyo, Beijing and Jakarta as top-category embassies in Asia. Ambassador Dean made the announcement on 17 December.

[redacted] 25X
Chief, Bangkok Bureau, FBIS

WRS:mk

Attachments:
Engineering Report
Production Report
Embassy Circuit Outage Report

Distribution:
C/Okinawa Bureau

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